

Testimony of

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Before the

Education Committee

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Good afternoon, Senator McCrory, Representative Currey, Senator Berthel, Representative McCarty, and members of the Education Committee. I testify today in support of House Bill 6884. This bill takes important steps toward addressing the educator shortage in Connecticut, showing educators that theirs is a respected profession, and ensuring that our classrooms and schools can provide the best possible education for our students.

I have been a teacher since 1992. I am evaluated as an exemplary teacher and I am dedicated to my students and the subject that I teach. For me, teaching has gone from a rewarding passion to a soul crushing daily struggle with grossly inadequate financial compensation. There is no leading factor; it is endless tiny details that have accumulated slowly and that now result in a job that is undoable. These challenges include the inclusion of students with ever increasing needs, being mainstreamed into the classroom without the proper staffing and resources to support the student and teacher. The decrease of teacher's rights and the increase in parent's rights, in regards to what happens in the classroom, has led to student behaviors that at best, can be defined as basic disrespect, and at worst can be described as violent and destructive outbursts. Teachers are not allowed to physically defend ourselves, and when the crisis situation is over, there are zero consequences for the student or parent. The other students are deprived of instruction and suffer from anxiety and depression as a result of these outbursts. How can one student be allowed to have so much influence over the climate of a classroom, while the teacher has so little? Decisions are made in regards to curriculum, instruction, scheduling, and allotment of funds, with little or no input from the teachers who are in the classroom. Our buildings are crumbling and if we are fortunate enough to receive upgrades, we are not consulted on what teachers need in terms of storage, flexible seating, plumbing, or placement of electronics. I am fortunate enough to work in two relatively newer buildings. That said, neither of these facilities were built with AC in the classrooms. In September, May, and June (almost 1/3 of the school year), our classrooms can reach temperatures of over 90 degrees. The fans that were hung in our rooms are poorly placed and provide little if any relief. Opening the windows is often not an option, as they are designed to

not open and even when they do open, there is little relief for a hot classroom, if it is even more hot and humid outside. These are the conditions under which we are supposed to get our youngest learners to absorb material that is not appropriate for their developmental level. The state makes demands in terms of teacher performance and student test scores but DOES NOT ALLOW teachers to be part of the conversation. It is ludicrous that teachers report to their classrooms every day and are forced to teach in a manner that they know is harmful to the mental, social, and intellectual growth of their students, while being fully aware of what their students need to be successful educationally and emotionally. In many ways we are prohibited to provide instruction that we know to be beneficial and age appropriate. Inadequate funding leads to overwhelming circumstances for teachers: staff leaving the profession, resources dwindling, schedules overflowing, responsibilities multiplied. The only factor that does not increase is our salaries. They have remained stagnant and any raises we might receive are eaten up by the increase in medical premiums. I simply don't understand how people required to have master's degrees to do their jobs, are forced to live paycheck to paycheck, yet endure such miserable working conditions. The constant repeating of '....but you get your summers off?', has gotten so old. We don't get paid in the summers. We get paid only for the days that are in our contractual calendar.....Understand that we work days above and beyond those in our contract, but we do not get paid for them. I do not get paid for the two weeks that I spend in the summer, preparing my stifling hot classrooms (I have two) and student documents (class lists, grade sheets, student portfolios, etc.) for the school year ahead. I also do not get paid for the hours that I come in early in order to prepare for activities, stay late to record grades, or Saturdays spent working on report cards.....the list goes on and on. In other professions, employees are rewarded with more paid vacation for years of loyalty to the company. My sister gets eight weeks paid vacation (she does not have a college degree). My brother gets six (he has a bachelor's degree). I get zero days of paid vacation.....a few paid holidays, yes, but zero paid vacation days and absolutely no perks for working in the same district for 29 years. Go ahead and make school year round. If teachers were compensated fairly for it and given paid vacation and the freedom to take that vacation when I wanted, rather than just in the summer or during breaks, like other professions, I would gladly teach all year round. Please, please give teachers a voice. You cannot continue to expect teachers to show up to their jobs under these conditions, and get compensated so little. We need better pay, we need a say, and we need protection.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

